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# Teaching Evaluation and the Quality Assurance of Undergraduate Education in China

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## Abstract

*Since China has adopted a policy of expanding higher education (HE) enrolment in 1999, HE has developed at a very fast pace. Presently the total enrolment of all the Chinese HEIs stands at 23 million students, i.e. 21 percent gross enrolment rate of the usual age cohort. It is predicted that the gross enrolment rate of 2020 will be 40 percent.*

*With this rapid growth of HE enrolment, many problems arose. One of them is the quality of higher education. The quality of undergraduate education is compromised by factors such as lack of funding, insufficient numbers of qualified faculty, lack of facilities and other infrastructure, for example libraries, and an inadequate management system that is unable to deal effectively with the explosion of student numbers. Therefore, quality has become a concern of public authorities and HEIs themselves.*

*In this article, I shall describe and analyze the measures taken to improve the quality of (undergraduate) teaching in Chinese HEIs, especially the teaching evaluation of undergraduate education.*

## 1. Introduction

Since China has adopted a policy of expanding higher education (HE) enrolment in 1999, HE has developed at a very fast pace. With this rapid growth of HE enrolment, many problems arose. One of them is the quality of higher education. After the poor quality of (undergraduate) education in most Chinese HEIs had become a concern to students, academic teachers, administrators, and the public. The document of "Action Scheme for Revitalizing Education between 2003-2007"(issued by the Ministry of Education, authorized by State Council ,2004) expressed concern with the poor teaching quality and postulated reforms of teaching in HEIs. In October of 2004, the Ministry of Education (MOE) had decided to introduce a "teaching quality and teaching reform project of HEIs". As the

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central piece of this reform, the Ministry established a Higher Education Evaluation Center (HEEC) in 2004.

The HE system in China mainly includes the general HE, adult HE, advanced vocational education and other specific forms of HE. This paper mainly focus on the general HE. The general HE includes three levels: graduate education, undergraduate education, advanced vocational colleges and other institutes. Evaluation of graduate education is the responsibility of the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council (ADCSC) and the China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC). Evaluation of undergraduate HEIs is led by MOE, specifically implemented by HEEC. Evaluation of advanced vocational colleges and other institutes are organized by the educational departments of provinces, regions and municipal cities, and inspected by MOE at random. Through frequent, continuous evaluations of HEIs, it was expected that the quality of HE would be significantly improved (ZhouJi, 2006).

In this paper, I shall describe and analyze the measures taken to improve the quality of (undergraduate) teaching in Chinese HEIs, especially the teaching evaluation of undergraduate education.

Before looking into the types, modes of these evaluations and the criteria by which teaching programs were to be evaluated, a brief overview of higher education in China and its development over the last decade seems useful for readers unfamiliar with China.

## **2. Higher Education Development since 1999**

Since the Communist Party Central Committee promulgated the “Decision on the reform of educational system” in 1985, Chinese higher education has undergone many reforms. In February 1993, the Communist Party Central Committee and the State Council jointly passed “the National Guidelines of Educational Reform and Development”. This document brought Chinese higher education into a new stage of reform and development.

Since China has adopted a policy of expanding HE enrolment in 1999, Chinese HE has grown rapidly. In 2000 Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Anhui and Inner Mongolia began to organize the unified entrance examination in Spring in addition to the unified entrance examination held in Summer. This gave high school graduates another opportunity to attend the HEIs. At the same time, MOE abolished the limitation on age of the unified entrance examination participants. Due to these measures, Chinese

HE has made significant progress, particularly in two respects:(1) an integrated HE system has been established, which encompasses basically all branches of learning at an advanced level, combining both degree and non-degree education and integrating advanced vocational colleges and other institutes education, undergraduate education and graduate education;(2) the total enrolment in HEIs has grown dramatically which meant that the gross enrolment ratio (GER) of the typical age cohort has also increased (from 3.7 percent in 1990 to 21 percent in 2005).

Chinese graduate education has two levels- master and doctor. At each level, two kinds of people are trained to meet the country's different needs: academic personnel for teaching and research in HEIs and scientific research institutes, and personnel with a background in applied fields such as masters of business administration, masters of engineers, masters of education and clinical doctors.

In the past years, Chinese graduate education developed fast (see Table 1).

Year	Annual enrolment			Total enrolment		
	Total	Doctor	Master	Total	Doctor	Master
1998	7.25	1.5	5.75	19.89	4.52	15.36
1999	9.22	1.99	7.23	23.53	5.4	17.95
2000	12.85	2.51	10.34	30.12	6.73	23.39
2001	16.52	3.21	13.31	39.33	8.59	30.74
2002	20.26	3.83	16.43	50.1	10.87	39.23
2003	26.89	4.87	20.02	65.13	13.67	51.46
2004	32.62	5.33	27.3	81.99	16.56	65.43
2005	36.48	5.48	31	97.86	19.13	78.73

Source: Ministry of Education (2006)

**Table 1 Number of Students Enrolled in Graduate Education (10,000)**

From Table 1 we know that the annual enrolment in 1998 and 2005 is 72,500 and 364,800 respectively. The increase percent is 403%. The total enrolment in 1998 and 2005 is 198,900 and 978,600 respectively, the increase percent is 392%. Both the annual enrolment and total enrolment of Chinese graduate education from 1998 to 2005 increased around 400%.

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Enrolment (million)	1.08	1.59	2.20	2.68	3.20	3.82	4.47	5.04
Increase (%)		47.2	38.4	21.8	19.4	19.4	17.0	12.8

Source: Ministry of Education (2006)

**Table 2 Annual Enrolment in General HEIs since 1998**

Year	1978	1990	1995	1998	1999	2000	2003	2004	2005
GER(%)	1.4	3.7	5.7	9.8	10.5	11.0	17	19	21

Source: Ministry of Education (2006)

**Table 3 Gross Enrolment Rates 1978 to 2005**

Table 2 shows that enrolment in general HEIs in 1998 is 1.08 millions, it is 5.04 millions in 2005, the increase of enrolment from 1998 to 2005 is 3.96 millions, the increase percent is 367%. Table 3 shows that the gross enrolment rate tripled between 1990 and 1999 and again doubled between 1999 and 2005.

Total enrolment in all HEIs in 2005 was 23 million students, i.e. 21 percent gross enrolment rate of the usual age cohort. It is predicted that the gross enrolment rate will be 40 percent in 2020 (WuQidi, 2006).

With this rapid growth of HE enrolment, many problems arose. One of them is the quality of higher education. The quality of undergraduate education is compromised by factors such as the insufficient funding on teaching, insufficient numbers of qualified faculty, lack of facilities and other infrastructure, for example libraries. There is also an inadequate management system that is unable to deal effectively with the explosion of student numbers, insufficient innovation with regard to (undergraduate) teaching and learning. Therefore, quality has become a concern of public authorities and HEIs, not to mention employers and students themselves.

## **2. Higher Education Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Teaching (1985-2006)**

Following afore-mentioned "Decision on reforms of educational system" of 1985, the National Educational Commission (NEC, the predecessor of MOE) organized a workshop on HE evaluation and discussed to establish the HE evaluation system. This was the beginning of educational evaluation in China (Ji Fangfang, 2006). In the same year, the NEC started an evaluation of higher engineering

education. As well some provinces and cities began to launch experimental evaluation of educational level, programs and curricula in HEIs.

In October 1990, the NEC issued 'Tentative regulations on general HE evaluation', which regulated the nature, purpose, task, guiding ideas, as well as the basic format and process of HE evaluation. This was the first legislation on HE evaluation in China. In November of 1993, Research Society for HE Evaluation was officially founded.

In the beginning of 1994, NEC started to implement the undergraduate teaching evaluation of general HEIs. There are three types of evaluations.

The first type is the 'Pass' level evaluation for HEIs established with a comparatively weak academic basis and a short history of undergraduate education. This kind of evaluation began in 1994. Almost all these HEIs were established since 1976. The purpose of the evaluation was to motivate these HEIs to reach the national teaching level and quality standards by helping them to enhance the basis of teaching and teaching management. These HEIs to be evaluated in this category were designated by the NEC.

The second type is the 'Excellence' level evaluation for HEIs with a good academic basis, high quality research and teaching programs and a comparatively long history of undergraduate education. This kind of evaluation began in 1996, focusing on the top 100 HEIs. The main purpose of this type of evaluation was to motivate these institutions to further improve their programs. These HEIs were designated by NEC on the basis of their application.

The third type of evaluation is the 'Random' evaluation of the HEIs that range between Pass level and Excellence level. This kind of evaluation began in 1999. Participating HEIs were designated by the MOE (the NEC was renamed MOE in 1998) at random.

In 2002, the MOE combined these three types of HEIs' evaluations into one, named the undergraduate teaching evaluation of general HEIs. At the same time the Ministry folded the three evaluation plans into one, that is the 'Tentative undergraduate teaching evaluation plan of general HEIs'. It is used to evaluate teaching of all general HEIs since 2002.

In August of 2003, the MOE decided to evaluate the undergraduate teaching of all the general HEIs. The 'Action Scheme for Revitalizing Education between 2003-2007', decreed that teaching evaluations of general HEIs would take place in five- year and that in the future all general undergraduate HEIs will be evaluated every five years, starting 2003.

In order to implement the undergraduate teaching evaluation of general HEIs, MOE officially established a HE Evaluation Center in October of 2004. The establishment of the center indicated that the teaching evaluation work of HEIs became more scientific, standardized, and systematic.

The HE Evaluation Center is thus an administrative unit which is affiliated with the MOE. It is responsible for implementing teaching evaluation of general undergraduate HEIs. The duties of the center include also:

- (1) To conduct research on policy, law and theory of HEIs' teaching reform and evaluation, to provide references for policy-making of MOE;
- (2) To organize cooperation and exchange with intermediate organizations of other countries, special regions of Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan, to sign HE teaching evaluation agreements with non-governmental organizations and folk organizations according to governmental empowerment;
- (4) To organize international exchanges and cooperation with respect to HEIs' teaching research;
- (5) To train the evaluation experts; and
- (6) To provide consulting and information services related to HE teaching evaluation.

The funding resources of the Center mainly come from two channels: national funding specific for teaching evaluation; and the revenues generated by the Center itself.

The Center is relatively small with only 15 full-time staff. Its subdivisions include an office of administration, a division of teaching evaluation of HEIs, a division of evaluation on programs and special items, and a comprehensive training division. As the size of HE teaching evaluation grows, the staff is projected to increase to 30 people. Importantly, besides the staff of the Center, there are about 1,400 external evaluation experts.

The evaluation experts are selected and certified by the central government and the MOE. The criteria for the selections/certifications include the experts' experience in research, teaching and management. Almost all the evaluation experts are from within the HE system. No other social institutions is therefore involved in the evaluation (HuangYa, 2005).

Presently, evaluation experts are either presidents, academic vice-presidents, or scholars in HEIs. Most of them have sufficient experience of teaching and classroom management, most of the experts are middle-aged and senior people. There are no relevant regulations for the evaluation experts, nor regular training courses for them, and there is no control system in place to supervise or monitor the

work of the experts.

A total 454 general undergraduate HEIs were evaluated from 1994 to 2002 (WuQidi, 2006). In the new five-year-cycle evaluation (2003-2007), 592 HEIs are being evaluated. 171 undergraduate HEIs were evaluated from 2003 to the end of 2005, and over 139 HEIs in 2006, while the remaining institutions must be evaluated in 2007(ZhouJi, 2006).

The results of the undergraduate teaching level evaluation classified into four kinds, such as excellent, good, qualified/pass, and unqualified/fail. In 2003, of the 42 institutions be evaluated, 20 were judged excellent, 19 were good, and three were just qualified (MOE, 2004). Of the 54 HEIs be evaluated in 2004, 30 were considered to be “excellent”, 19 were good, and five passed as “qualified”. In spite of the concern about low quality, mentioned above, no institution failed to pass the evaluation in 2003 and 2004 (MOE, 2005).

The main criteria for the teaching evaluation of general undergraduate HEIs are defined on two levels. The first defines seven indicators, such as guidelines of running schools, the lecturing teachers team, teaching facilities and their use, program construction and teaching reform, teaching management, ethos of learning, and teaching results. The second includes nineteen indicators, which eleven of them are most important, such as ideas of running schools, number and structure of teachers team , basic teaching facilities, expenditure on teaching, teaching programs, curricula, practice teaching, quality control, and so on ( see appendix: INDICATORS SYSTEM FOR THE TEACHING LEVEL EVALUATION OF GENERAL UNDERGRADUATE HEIs).

As mentioned in the beginning, no order to prompt the HEIs to enhance their teaching quality and engage actively in improving their teaching through innovations and internal reforms, an effective and long available quality assurance system and control mechanism are needed. The main purposes of the teaching evaluations therefore includes:

To establish a system of periodic collection of basic data on facilities and teaching in general HEIs; More importantly perhaps is to encourage educational administrative departments to cooperate with other units and related professional societies to establish a supervision and control system by the universities themselves, i.e. set up mechanisms for internal self-control and quality mechanism, where appropriate with the participation of social and intermediate organizations.

### **3. Critical Analysis**



Quality assurance of HE is a systematic project. The teaching evaluation of general undergraduate HEIs organized by MOE is a kind of external control for the quality assurance. In order to further promote the quality and whole capacity of Chinese HE, the Chinese central government decided to implement the “Teaching Quality and Teaching Reform Project of Undergraduate HEIs” since January 26 of 2007. Funding resources for this project of amounted to 2.5 billion RMB in the future five years from 2006 to 2010 (Si,Gao,2007). For the HEIs themselves, there are other internal mechanisms to monitor and control their quality, such as establishing a control committee for educational quality, students’ evaluation for teaching and teachers, periodic self-evaluation, etc.

There are multiple effects of the teaching evaluation on the institutions: increasing the funding on teaching; improving the teaching basic facilities; enhancing the teaching management; establishing the central role of teaching; promote the educational quality. In general, most of the HEIs be evaluated stated that the evaluation promote the construction, development and reforms of HEIs(ZhouJi,2006).

If the HEIs received a good evaluation result, they may get more money from the central and local governments, attract excellent professors and students, and obtain a good social reputation. All of these are so important to the future development of the HEIs. So all the HEIs attached more importance to the teaching evaluation. This assumes great pressure on faculty and staff who have to accommodate much greater student numbers than before without the adequate level of resources/facilities. ‘Quality’ can’t just be ordered from above, it must be introduced with the active participation of the teachers and administrators.

Current criteria for teaching evaluation of general undergraduate HEIs mainly focus on the teaching, but do not pay much attention to the students’ learning. Another problem is that the MOE evaluated all the general undergraduate HEIs with the same criteria.

Almost all the evaluation experts come from the educational institutions, no one is from other divisions of the society. Regarding their age, most of them are middle-aged and senior people. There are no relevant regulations for the evaluation experts, nor regular training courses for them, and there is no control system in place to supervise or monitor the work of the experts. In order to solve these problems, it raises the approaches of strengthening the construction of the expert team of undergraduate teaching level evaluation: carrying out certificating system, establishing database of experts, and formulating the regular training systems of experts. (ZhangZhili,2006)

With regard to teaching quality and mechanisms of evaluation and assurance, undergraduate teaching quality has been the focus of concern and action. In contract, the quality of other levels and kinds of higher education is very weak, and often overlooked, such as the advanced vocational

colleges and institutes, private and adult HEIs. (YuXiaobo, WangZhifang, 2006). HE quality was influenced by many factors, the related subjects (including governments, society and HEIs) should use various methods to promote it. For example, from the perspective of governments, except the evaluation, there are other measures, such as legislation, administration, etc. From the perspective of the society, there are the social supervision, market orientation, etc. From the perspective of the HEIs, there are system regulations, supervision and check, feedback and regulating, motivating and guiding, etc. Teaching evaluation is only one of the quality assurance measures, it is not the whole.

#### **4. Summary**

Chinese HE grows fast in the past decade. With the enrolment increase of students, the quality of HE becomes the concern of many agencies, including the governments, the HEIs, the units who employed HEIs' graduates, etc.

China began to evaluate the HEIs since 1985. In the over twenty years, HE evaluation developed gradually. The development of teaching evaluation evoked intense repercussions among educational administrative departments and HEIs and played an important role in the improvement of HE quality.

Although higher education quality assurance in China has made much progress in the past decades, there are many problems and shortages. In principle, quality and its evaluation have been paid much attention to while there is little agreement on what is quality teaching and what are the theoretical foundations of it. So far, it has been primarily the government who plays a prominent role in quality assurance efforts while universities and other HEIs who have problems to deal with the enormous increase of students have been less concerned, or rather: have not have the time and the resources to concentrate on quality issues.

With the implementation of "Teaching Quality and Teaching Reform Project of Undergraduate HEIs" in 2007, more and more measures will be in place. The teaching evaluation will play a more important role continually in promoting HE quality.

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## Appendix

### INDICATORS SYSTEM FOR THE TEACHING EVALUATION OF GENERAL UNDERGRADUATE HEIs

1.Guidelines of running school	
1.1 Orientation of HEIs	
1.1.1 orientation and planning	1.0
<b>1.2 Ideas of running school</b>	
1.2.1 educational ideas	0.5
1.2.2 focus on teaching	0.5
2. Faculty team	
<b>2.1 number and structure</b>	
2.1.1 student –teacher ratio	0.3
2.1.2 total structure and developmental trends	0.4
2.1.3 percentage of teachers with M. or D. degree	0.3
2.2 lecturing teachers	
2.2.1 qualifications	0.3
2.2.2 state of teaching undergraduate students by professors and associate professors	0.3
2.2.3 teaching level	0.4
3. Teaching facilities and their use	
<b>3.1 basic teaching facilities</b>	
3.1.1 building	0.2
3.1.2 labs and practice base	0.2
3.1.3 library	0.2
3.1.4 Internet construction	0.2
3.1.5 Gymnasium and physical education facilities	0.2
<b>3.2 teaching expenditure</b>	
3.2.1 the ratio of 4 expenditures <sup>2</sup> stands at tuition fees	0.6
3.2.2 increase of 4 expenditures per student	0.4
4. Programs construction and teaching reform	
<b>4.1 programs</b>	
4.1.1program structure and composition	0.5
4.1.2 training plan	0.5
<b>4.2 curricula</b>	
4.2.1 reform on teaching content and curricula system	0.3
4.2.2 textbook construction and selection	0.3
4.2.3 reform on teaching method and means	0.3
4.2.4 bilingual teaching	0.1
<b>4.3 practice teaching</b>	
4.3.1 practice and practice training	0.3
4.3.3 comprehensive and designed experiment	0.2
4.3.4 opening of labs	0.1
5. teaching management	
5.1 management team	
5.1.1 structure and quality	0.6
5.1.2 research and practice results of teaching management and teaching reform	0.4
<b>5.2 quality control</b>	
5.2.1 construction and implementation of teaching regulations and system	0.3
5.2.2 quality standard of every procedure of teaching	0.3
5.2.3 teaching quality control	0.4
6. Ethos of learning	
6.1 Ethos of teachers	
6.1.1 moral accomplishments of teachers and their spirit of engagement	1.0

6.2 Ethos of learning	
6.2.1 state of students' abiding for HEIs' discipline and regulations	0.3
6.2.2 construction of learning ethos, measures and results of motivating students	0.3
6.2.3 extra-curriculum scientific technology and cultural activities	0.4
7. Teaching results	
<b>7.1 basic theory and technique</b>	
7.1.1 actual level of students' basic theory and technique	0.7
7.1.2 creative ideas and practice ability of students	0.3
<b>7.2 thesis and graduation design</b>	
7.2.1 nature, difficulty, magnitude, comprehensive training of the thesis	0.5
7.2.2 quality of thesis and graduation design	0.5
<b>7.3 moral accomplishments</b>	
7.3.1 students' moral accomplishments, cultural and mental quality	1.0
7.4 physical education	
7.4.1 physical education	1.0
7.5 social reputation	
7.5.1 students' quality	0.6
7.5.2 social evaluation	0.4
7.6 job placement	
7.6.1 state of job placement	1.0
Special items	

This indicators system includes 7 first level indicators and 19 second level indicators. Among the 19 indicators, there are 11 most important indicators( in italicized) and 8 moderate indicators.